

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

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TO THE SECRETARY FROM HABIB

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, LE, UR

SUBJECT: BRIEFING MEMORANDUM: SOVIET RELATIONSHIP
TO OUR LEBANESE EVACUATION

1. YOU ASKED THAT WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE VARIOUS COURSES
OF ACTION OPEN TO THE SOVIETS RELATIVE TO OUR BEIRUT
EVACUATION, AND TO OUTLINE SOME SCENARIOS WE MIGHT FOLLOW
IN THESE VARIOUS CONTINGENCIES. THE FOLLOWING REPRESENTS
OUR FIRST VIEW; WE WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR GUIDANCE AS TO ANY
ASPECTS YOU WOULD LIKE US TO LOOK INTO FURTHER.

2. IT IS OUR ASSESSMENT THAT THE SOVIETS WILL PROBABLY
ADOPT AN ESSENTIALLY PASSIVE ROLE, NEITHER HELPING US
SECURE PALESTINIAN COOPERATION, NOR ACTIVELY ASSISTING THE
PLO IN A CONFRONTATION WITH US. WE HAVE ALSO FOUND THAT
THERE IS A LIMITED NUMBER OF THINGS WE CAN DO TO INDUCE
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THE SOVIETS TO LEAN ON THE PLO OR TO DISCOURAGE THEM

FROM ASSISTING THE PALESTINIANS. IF OUR ANALYSIS IS CORRECT, THE PROBLEM OF THE SOVIET ROLE WITH RESPECT TO THE EVACUATION IS REALLY SUBSUMED IN THE LARGER PROBLEM OF WHAT WE CAN DO TO COUNTER SOVIET PRESSURES ON SYRIA.

3. SOVIET ATTITUDE TOWARD OUR BEIRUT EVACUATION

THEORETICALLY, AT LEAST, THE SOVIETS CAN FOLLOW THREE ALTERNATIVE COURSES IN RELATION TO OUR EVACUATION AND THE PLO'S APPARENT EXPLOITATION OF IT FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES. THEY CAN TRY TO INDUCE THE PLO TO FACILITATE THE EVACUATION; THEY CAN TAKE AN ESSENTIALLY PASSIVE STANCE; OR THEY CAN ACTIVELY ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT THE PLO IN DEFYING THE U.S. IN PRACTICE, REGARDLESS OF WHICH OF THE ALTERNATIVES THE SOVIETS MAY CHOOSE, THEIR SUPPORT OF THE PLO AGAINST SYRIA NO DOUBT HAS SOME BEARING ON THE PLO'S REACTION TO OUR PARTICULAR PROBLEM AND IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR US TO ISOLATE THE TWO QUESTIONS.

A. SEEK PLO COOPERATION WITH US:

DESPITE THEIR BACKING OF THE PLO, THE SOVIETS MAY CONSIDER THAT INVOLVING THE U.S. IN THIS WAY CONTAINS UNCERTAINTIES AND RISKS FOR THEM INCOMMENSURATE WITH ANY ADVANTAGES FOR THE PLO. EVEN IF MOSCOW WERE TO TAKE THIS POSITION, HOWEVER, IT IS NOT AT ALL CERTAIN THAT THE PLO WOULD ACCOMMODATE ITSELF.

MOSCOW'S VERY WILLINGNESS TO BACK THE PLO SO STRONGLY REFLECTS A DEGREE OF SOVIET DEPENDENCE ON THE PALESTINIANS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF MOSCOW'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY THAT LIMITS SOVIET ABILITY TO GET TOUGH WITH THEM.

IF MOSCOW IS AT ALL INCLINED TO ACT MODERATELY, WE CAN ENCOURAGE IT TO THE DEGREE WE CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT THE PLO ACTION DOES POSE RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES. WE CAN:

-- STRESS TO THE SOVIETS AND OTHERS THAT THE PLO IS ON A CONFRONTATION COURSE;

-- MOVE THE FLEET CLOSER;
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-- CALL AMBASSADOR MURPHY HOME FOR CONSULTATION (HIS RETURN WILL BE READ BY SOME AS CONNECTED WITH THE EVACUATION PROBLEM);

-- SEND AN OFFICER TO JOUNIE TO CONSULT WITH THE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP;

-- PROCEED WITH ARRANGEMENTS FOR A SEA EVACUATION, INFORM-

ING THE PLO AND THE SOVIETS THAT WE EXPECT IT TO BE SECURED (WE COULD LOSE THIS GAME OF CHICKEN IF THE PLO ANNOUNCED THAT IT COULD NOT SECURE IT AND THAT SERIOUS RISK WAS ENTAILED IN THE EVACUATION--FEW WOULD SHOW UP);

-- ATTACK THE PLO'S INTERESTS IN OTHER WAYS. THEY DERIVED CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC RELATIONS ADVANTAGE FROM THEIR COOPERATION WITH OUR EVACUATION IN JUNE. WE CAN SEE TO IT THAT THEIR FAILURE TO COOPERATE NOW HURTS THEIR INTERNATIONAL IMAGE IN THE SAME RESPECT.

-- WE COULD ALSO CONSIDER A GESTURE TO THE SOVIETS AIMED AT MINIMIZING THEIR INCLINATIONS TOWARD OPPORTUNISM, SUCH AS AN OFFER TO INCLUDE SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN PERSONNEL IN THE EVACUATION. WE SHOULD ALSO POINT OUT THAT SOVIET FACILITATION OF A SUCCESSFUL EVACUATION COULD CONTRIBUTE SUBSTANTIALLY TO AN APPRECIATION IN THE US OF SOVIET MODERATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND THAT ON THE OTHER HAND, CLEAR SOVIET SUPPORT FOR WHAT THE PLO IS DOING COULD HAVE A HIGHLY NEGATIVE EFFECT ON US PUBLIC OPINION.

B. PASSIVE STANCE:

THE SOVIETS MAY WELL FEEL THAT THE HEAT IS ON US AND THAT THERE IS LITTLE WE CAN OR WOULD DO THAT WOULD THREATEN THEM OR THEIR INTERESTS.

OUR STRATEGY SHOULD BE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THEIR INTERESTS CAN BE MADE TO SUFFER. THE SAME SCENARIO AS IN CONTINGENCY A WOULD BE RELEVANT HERE, BUT WE WOULD HAVE TO MAKE A GREATER EFFORT OR TAKE GREATER RISKS TO IMPRESS MOSCOW. WE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY THAT ANY MOVES ON OUR PART THAT HAD A THREATENING CHARACTER

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COULD BE EXPLOITED BY THE SOVIETS FOR HOSTILE PROPAGANDA IN TRYING TO BRING TOGETHER AGAINST US THE OTHERWISE DIVIDED ARABS.

AS ONE FURTHER STEP, WE COULD ATTEMPT TO GET EGYPTIAN, ISRAELI AND CONGRESSIONAL ACQUIESCENCE IN A DEMONSTRATIVE SHIPMENT OF AMMUNITION OR SOME OTHER CONSUMABLE MATERIEL TO SYRIA, SUCH AS POL.

C. SOVIET SUPPORT FOR THE PLO REFUSAL TO ASSIST OUR EVACUATION:

THE SOVIETS COULD, IF THEY WANTED TO SHOW ACTIVE SUPPORT FOR THE PLO:

-- MOVE THEIR FLEET CLOSER;

-- TELL US OR ANNOUNCE THAT THEY INTENDED TO STAND FOR NO
U.S. CHALLENGE TO THE PLO;

-- FLY SOME DIRECT SOVIET SUPPLY FLIGHTS INTO THE NEW

PALESTINIAN-CONTROLLED AIRPORTS;

-- URGE US TO GET THE SYRIANS TO TAKE PRESSURE OFF THE PLO.

HOWEVER, IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY IF THE USSR PURSUED THIS
COURSE THAT THEY WOULD ENCOURAGE THE PLO QUIETLY TO STAND
FIRM WITHOUT OPENLY CONFRONTING THE U.S.--OR SYRIA--WITH
PUBLICLY VISIBLE SUPPORT FOR THE PLO.

IF IT BECAME EVIDENT THAT THE USSR INTENDED TO BACK THE
PLO IN ITS CONFRONTATION WITH US, WE WOULD HAVE TO CONCLUDE
THAT THE SOVIETS CONSIDERED THE DANGER OF MAJOR ESCALATION
TO BE SLIGHT AND OUR OPTIONS TO BE LIMITED. FROM OUR
POINT OF VIEW, THE U.S.-SOVIET DIMENSION OF THE EVACUATION
WOULD AT THIS POINT BECOME A MAJOR CHALLENGE IN ITSELF.
WE WOULD WANT TO EXAMINE OUR RESPONSE MORE IN THE CONTEXT
OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH MOSCOW. THE SAME SCENARIO
OF MOVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST WOULD BE OPEN TO US AS IN THE
PREVIOUS TWO CONTINGENCIES BUT WOULD HAVE EVEN LESS LIKELI-
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HOOD OF TURNING THE PLO AROUND IN THE ABSENCE OF BILATERAL
PRESSURES ON THE SOVIETS.

WE COULD IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES BRING THE PROBLEM MORE OUT
INTO THE OPEN, ENDEAVORING THROUGH A VARIETY OF CHANNELS
BOTH IN WESTERN EUROPE AND IN THE MIDDLE EAST TO GENERATE
APPROACHES TO THE SOVIETS (AS WELL AS THE PALESTINIANS)
CRITICIZING THE GAME THEY ARE PLAYING. SUCH APPROACHES
MIGHT COME FROM JORDAN, IRAN, EGYPT, MOROCCO, UK, FRANCE,
GERMANY. THESE COULD ATTACK THE SOVIETS THROUGH DIPLO-
MATIC APPROACHES AND THROUGH STIMULATED EDITORIALS FOR
SUPPORTING THE PLO IN BLOCKING A HUMANITARIAN EXERCISE.

CONCLUSION:

THE SOVIETS ARE UNLIKELY EITHER TO PRESS FOR PLO COOPERA-
TION WITH US OR TO COMMIT THEMSELVES OPENLY IN SUPPORT OF
THE PLO MOVE AGAINST US (AS DISTINCT FROM SUPPORT OF THE
PLO AGAINST SYRIA). WE CAN PROBABLY EXPECT A VERBAL
RESPONSE LAYING THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROBLEM AT OUR
DOORSTEP. THEY MAY MOVE SOME SHIPS TO COUNTER OUR FLEET
MOVES, AND WARN US IN PRO FORMA FASHION AGAINST INTERVEN-

TION. FOR THE REST, THEY WILL PROBABLY LEAVE IT FOR US TO
COPE AS BEST WE CAN WITH THE PLO, WHILE MAINTAINING THEIR
GENERAL POSTURE OF SUPPORT FOR THE PLO AGAINST SYRIA.

IF THIS LATTER ASSESSMENT PROVES CORRECT, THEN THE PROBLEM
OF THE SOVIET ROLE WITH RESPECT TO OUR EVACUATION PROBLEMS
WITH THE PLO IS REALLY SUBSUMED IN THE LARGER PROBLEM OF
WHAT WE CAN DO TO COUNTER SOVIET PRESSURES ON SYRIA. ROBINSON

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